

“What if we told them they could also be their own bosses?”

Pinellas County’s Small Business Development Center Brings Entrepreneurship to Job Corps



Of the many misconceptions surrounding entrepreneurship, there may be no other as pervasive and mistaken as that of age.

“Kids don’t typically say, ‘When I finish school, I want to own my own business!’” attests Dr. Cynthia Johnson, Director of the **Small Business Development Center** (SBDC) at Pinellas County Economic Development (PCED). “They say they want to be doctors, police officers, teachers – those are all terrific goals and important careers. But what if we told them they could also be their own bosses? That they could turn a talent, an idea, a hobby into a career? And then, what if we gave them the tools and skills to do it? What if we showed them that entrepreneurship is for anyone, at any age?”

That’s exactly what’s happening at the **Pinellas County Job Corps Center**, thanks to a partnership between Job Corps and the SBDC at PCED. In addition to the academic and career training that are the heart of Job Corps’ program, students recently had the opportunity to participate in an eight-week series of entrepreneurship classes presented by the SBDC. From the basics of how to identify a sound business idea, through choosing a legal structure and developing marketing plans, to creating a plan for future growth, students learned through hands-on activities all aspects of entrepreneurship.

Commissioner Kenneth Welch, Chair of the Pinellas Board of County Commissioners and the Pinellas County Job Corps Center's Steering Committee, agrees that partnership is key to the Job Corps Center's success. "Job Corps succeeds when we connect the students to our community and jobs. I'm very proud of this collaboration between our Small Business Development Center team and these young entrepreneurs."

"Dr. Johnson and her staff were exceptional instructors!" reports Anita George, Business/Community Liaison for the Pinellas County Job Corps Center. "They engaged my students in the learning process and we are extremely grateful for their time and efforts."

Just ask Kimberly Walker and Ramon "Tito" Cruz, two Pinellas County Job Corps students who participated in the entrepreneurial classes and are ready to take the next steps toward starting their own businesses.

Kim has completed her career technical training in carpentry and is currently enrolled in Advanced Training in Cabinetry. She plans to start her own business under the name Carpenter Kim and will specialize in custom cabinetry designs. Through the entrepreneurship classes, Kim learned how to take an idea, couple it with advanced skills, and create a business that brings joy to both her and her clients.

"Loving what you do and wanting to get up every day to do what you were meant to – that's important," says Kim. "I look forward to having my business up and running, making money and serving customers with high-quality customized cabinets and furniture. I feel like Job Corps provided me with the technical skills I'll need to create my product and the SBDC showed me how to turn that into a business."

Tito Cruz also sees entrepreneurship as a means of establishing a career that blends a job with his dream. Tito and his cousin Luis Martinez have long shown a passion and affinity for music, so it seemed natural that they funnel that enthusiasm into a business concept. Enter Major Music Records (MMR), Tito's and Luis' start-up record label, which includes a recording studio, dedicated sound engineer and in-house producer.

"Our goal is to help bring undiscovered and talented artists to the forefront of the music industry," explains



Tito. “We are offering not just a genre of music, but an entire culture. Music is a key and crucial component in life and we wish to be there as the next generation enters adulthood. We want to be part of that experience.”

Exciting, ambitious ideas, from both Kim and Tito. And that’s all they may have been – ideas – without the information and resources provided by the SBDC.

“Less than a third of young Americans see entrepreneurship as more desirable than other career options¹,” stresses Dr. Johnson, “but small businesses are crucial to the local and national economy. So why not show young adults another way to put their skills to work? We can help take away the mystery of starting a business and teach them the concrete steps to do it.”

Kim reports that the activities and group work in the entrepreneurship series were both enjoyable and helpful, and she found the information on different start-up structures (sole proprietorship, partnership, LLC, etc.) of particular interest, as she considers adding a partner to her business.

“Our students very much appreciated the hands-on instruction and the willingness of their instructors to stay in touch after the classes ended. They know the SBDC will be there to assist them as they bring their business ideas to fruition,” says Anita George.

Dr. Johnson agrees, “Absolutely! It was fulfilling and exciting to see the Job Corps students’ interest in entrepreneurship. We at the SBDC and Pinellas County Economic Development want to continue supporting and encouraging young people to follow their dreams and ambitions. I think this partnership is a solid step in that direction and we’ll be here to assist Kim and Tito as they move their business ideas forward.”

Visit the Pinellas County Job Corps Center at <http://pinellascounty.jobcorps.gov>.

Learn more about entrepreneurship and the Small Business Development Center at Pinellas County Economic Development at www.pced.org/sbdc.

¹2010 YouthPulse Study, Kauffman Foundation: http://www.kauffman.org/uploadedFiles/youth_eship_report_2010.pdf